

## THE IMPLICATION OF IFON–ERIN–ILOBU CRISIS FOR THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

The Ifon–Ilobu–Erin–Osun communal crisis represents one of the most persistent and destabilising conflicts in the sociopolitical landscape of south-western Nigeria. Rooted in century-old land disputes, traditional rivalries, and boundary disagreements, the conflict has evolved into a complex political-economic phenomenon influenced by elite manipulation, state weakness, and institutional decay. This study investigates the origins, escalation, and consequences of the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu crisis, particularly its implications for Osun State’s political economy. The study relies heavily on secondary data drawn from official documents, scholarly literature, policy papers, and media reports. The findings reveal that ambiguous land boundaries, exploitative political practices, and fragile peace frameworks have collectively weakened governance, disrupted local economies, and displaced thousands of residents. Political interference and ineffective state mediation have deepened mistrust between citizens and government institutions. The study concludes that sustainable peace requires structural reforms in land governance, inclusive development, participatory conflict resolution mechanisms, and strengthened traditional-state coordination. It situates the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu crisis within the broader pattern of Nigeria’s subnational conflicts, demonstrating how localised tensions threaten both state economic stability and national cohesion.

**Keywords:** Communal conflict, political economy, Osun State, Ifon–Ilobu–Erin crisis, governance, land dispute, displacement, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Communal clashes remain a resilient thread in sub-Saharan Africa’s social fabric and are frequently linked to land, identity, and who gets to wield political power. These fights do not just spark immediate violence; they also slow economic growth, while the erosion of social trust can persist for years. According to UNDP 2021, this is the case. In Nigeria, tensions are most acute in places where land rights intersect with ethnic lineage, historical claims, and political fault lines. This pattern shows up in ongoing friction across Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, and, more recently, Osun State, where recurring clashes have upended governance and strained community relations. This is according to Edeh & Okonkwo (2020).

Arguably, one of the most illustrative and continuous examples of this dynamic is the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu crisis in Osun State. Despite repeated government interventions and peace accords, this conflict has erupted anew with marked strength, especially in 2021, 2023, and 2025. Those instances brought massive losses of property, forced dislocation, casualties, and loss of faith between communities over time. Beyond the immediate humanitarian costs, the crisis has far-reaching political and economic effects, reconfiguring local politics, distorting land use, and dampening agricultural and commercial activity across the affected areas.

The paper examines the multi-layered impact of the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict on the political economy of Osun State by tracing its historical roots, locating the near-term sparks, and unpacking the broader consequences for governance, security, and sustainable development. It also evaluates the outcomes of past interventions while proposing context-specific strategies to support durable peacebuilding and institutional reform.

### **Historical and contextual background**

Ifon, Erin–Osun, and Ilobu are three communities located in the Irepodun and Orolu Local Government Areas of Osun State. The communities share common cultural affiliations and adjoining farmlands stretching from Okanla to Obaagun through Ilie. Fights between each community over where one ends and another begins have fed tensions for decades, with each side insisting it has ancestral rights to the land.

This Ifon–Erin–Ilobu dispute has been one of the most intractable communal crises in the Southwest, marked by cycles of violence that have endured for many years. Significant flare-ups have surfaced in 2000, 2010, 2015, 2021, 2023, and 2025, showing a pattern: a brief calm is often followed by renewed clashes. In March 2021, the violence claimed five lives and left over 50 houses in ruins, triggering statewide worry over the government's ability to check the spread of violence. Even in the wake of a 2022 peace accord, fighting resurfaced in 2023, displacing thousands and undermining the agreement. The April 2025 clashes were the most economically ruinous yet, with property losses surpassing ₦2 billion. These repeated eruptions point to deep-seated local grievances but also a structural flaw in conflict prevention at the level of government response, which tends to be reactive rather than strategic.

The core of the dispute is a long-running fight over land ownership and boundaries, intensified by the 1978 Land Use Act. This Act, by giving the government final say over land, disrupted traditional tenure systems and blurred customary boundaries, breeding feelings of dispossession and mistrust among communities. As Oluduro & Adesina (2018) would put it, beyond the legal maze, the conflict is deepened by the social psychology of ethnic pride and territorial identity. For the Ifon, Erin, and Ilobu communities, land is linked to each community's historical legitimacy and collective identity, and concessions are therefore emotionally and culturally hard to yield. Political players often exploit these loyalties, especially around elections, where ethnic divisions are used as tools to mobilise voters. Ajayi (2023) supports this. High youth unemployment adds another layer: idle young men can be recruited into vigilante groups or militant factions, turning structural poverty into a spark for violence.

The conflict continues in part because it involves a complex network of actors, some of whom compete with one another. The traditional rulers—the Olufon of Ifon, the Olobu of Ilobu, and the Elerin of Erin—perform dual roles: peacemakers in crises but also perceived as biased champions for the territorial interests of their respective communities. Youth vigilante groups are in the vanguard, mobilised in an instant via informal networks. Self-accusations of partiality by local government officials have called into question state-led initiatives. At the broader

level, the Osun State Government and federal security agencies intervene, mainly during the height of the violence, to restore order by deploying police or military units.

However, this intervention is not sustained, and a general absence of engagement allows the violence to recur. Due to the number of actors with different agendas, the conflict remains fragmented, and lasting peace proves difficult to attain. Many peace efforts have been tried, but most offer only temporary relief. Traditional mediation by royal leaders and town hall dialogues can calm tensions, yet they do not tackle the structural causes of the conflict. Military deployments can restore immediate calm, but do not deliver lasting solutions and sometimes fuel local resentment. The 2022 Peace Accord, for instance, showed these gaps: though initially welcomed, it lacked enforcement mechanisms and did not include key groups like youth leaders who drive violence. By 2023, the accord had collapsed, and hostilities reignited with renewed intensity. The pattern of interventions, episodic, state-led, and insufficiently attentive to the political economy of land, identity, and local power struggles, helps explain why peace remains elusive.

### **Research problem**

Land remains one of Nigeria's most contested and politicised resources, particularly in agricultural areas such as Osun State. Despite constitutional provisions and the 1978 Land Use Act, land and boundary disputes persisted, highlighting significant discrepancies between formal legislation and customary practice. The perennial conflicts between Ifon, Erin-Osun, and Ilobu represent a sticking point of land-related conflicts in the Southwest, from colonial to democratic times (Oyetade, 2022).

The question at the core of the issue is why this conflict has not yet been resolved, despite various government attempts through local boundary committees, judicial inquiries, and peace talks. Political meddling, ethnic identity politics, and weak rule enforcement have weakened the mechanisms of conflict resolution. This struggle began to grow more complex, from simple boundary lines into a tangled mix of land rights, political favouritism, and community identity.

Besides, the increasing frequency and intensity of the conflict have undermined local governance and economic activity: markets are shut, farmers are displaced, and social infrastructure is damaged, worsening poverty and diminishing trust in state institutions. As Adebayo (2023) has indicated, the delay in realising lasting peace suggests that policy responses have been more reactive than structural.

The study, therefore, attempts to dissect the socio-political and institutional factors that keep the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu land conflict alive and to assess the extent to which weak land administration, the politicisation of dispute issues, and inadequate conflict-resolution frameworks have contributed to its persistence in Osun State. It also explores how integrated strategies—legal reform, community participation, and modern geospatial mapping—could foster sustainable peace.

### **Significance of the study**

It is a work that matters both academically and practically, showing how land governance, politics, and peacebuilding intersect in Nigeria's subnational contexts.

**Theoretical and Academic Contribution:** The study enriches scholarship on land and identity politics, linking ideas of political instrumentalism, social identity, and conflict transformation. It provides empirical insight into how local clashes in Osun reflect broader national patterns of

political manipulation, administrative neglect, and socio-economic marginalisation. By focusing on 2010–2025, it presents updated data and analysis that go beyond the pre-2010 studies by Albert (2021) and Meagher (2022).

**Policy and Governance Relevance:** Findings could guide policymakers toward evidence-based land governance reforms, specifically transparent boundary demarcation and community land titling through a GIS approach. This research argues for a State Boundary and Peace Commission dedicated to bringing together traditional rulers, local governments, and civil society to monitor and resolve conflicts, thereby strengthening institutional legitimacy and paving the way for future conflict prevention.

**Socio-economic Development Impact:** Resolving land conflicts will unlock rural economies, increase agricultural productivity, and restore investor confidence. Stable land tenure undergirds food security and infrastructure growth in Osun State. The study's recommendations may support economic recovery and social cohesion in areas of conflict, such as Ifon, Erin, and Ilobu. **Peacebuilding and Social Integration** The work underscores peacebuilding through community-led reconciliation and inter-communal dialogue grounded in the Yoruba concepts of *afowofa*, or self-restraint, and *alafia*, or peaceful coexistence. Integrating these cultural values into formal mediation can help attain lasting peace. Future Research Foundation. This work lays the foundation for further research on subnational land conflict and local governance, as well as conflict-transformation strategies in Nigeria. It invites interdisciplinarity between law, geography, and political science with a view to finding long-term solutions to land-based insecurity. In essence, the study goes beyond mere description to offer strategic, practical, evidence-based solutions for a deeply ingrained crisis. It highlights ways in which land, politics, and identity intersect in local governance and feeds into the broader national discussion on peacebuilding and rural development in Nigeria, among other institutional reforms.

## Literature Review

The link between land, power, and personal identity has long drawn scholars into Nigeria's development debate. How ownership of land shapes community identity, political legitimacy, and relations between groups has been the subject of various research. In south-western Nigeria, particularly in Yorubaland, land is not simply something one owns; rather, it is a marker of ancestry, authority, and belonging. Aderinto notes that "the notion of *ilé* (land) in Yoruba thought conveys both material subsistence and spiritual connection with ancestral lineages, which makes land disputes emotionally charged and hard to resolve.

**Historic background of land conflicts:** It was colonial rule that laid the foundation for the land disputes that continue to this day. The Indirect Rule system and Native Authority under the British government (1900–1960) accorded some traditional rulers political recognition and jurisdiction, thereby increasing existing rivalries. According to Falola and Heaton (2020), the drawing of colonial boundary lines did not respect indigenous land ownership, thus "arbitrary lines cut across the communal territories." Such a split can still be seen in post-independence conflicts, such as the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu dispute in Osun State.

**Post-colonial changes and the Land Use Act:** The 1978 Land Use Act concentrated land ownership in the hands of state governors and replaced communal systems. However, Oluduro and Adesina (2018) argue that the Act engendered conflict between customary landowners and the state. It excluded traditional authorities while failing to provide a workable land

administration system. What has emerged is a dualism between statutory and customary ownership that has made rural land management complex, as illustrated by the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu incident.

**Current dynamics:** Local land disputes have become increasingly politicised since 2010. According to Ajayi (2023), political actors use rivalry within the community to gain votes, while local elites exploit these conflicts to secure state patronage. Oyetade (2022) goes further to say that a breakdown in land mapping and the absence of formal gazetting of boundaries make oral histories and historic claims the dominant narratives of disputes.

**Economic and social consequences:** Empirical work links land-related conflicts with economic decline. Adebayo (2023) reports that communal violence in Osun State from 2015 to 2023 resulted in property damage and a loss of agricultural productivity valued at more than ₦2 billion. World Bank (2018) findings indicate that the unresolved nature of land disputes consistently deters investment, limits access to farmland, and contributes to youth migration, reinforcing poverty.

Overall, the literature identifies land as both a resource and a political tool in Nigeria. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in an integrated analysis linking land administration, political instrumentalisation, and peacebuilding, particularly in Osun State.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study is grounded essentially in the Political Economy of Land, with accompanying lenses being SIT and the Instrumentalist Theory of Politics. Together, these could offer a layered perspective on this recurring Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict by linking governance deficits to identity-driven mobilisation and the political manoeuvring of actors.

### **Political Economy of Land**

The Political Economy of Land locates land at the heart of contestation, as a resource and a political asset sculpted by broader political and institutional forces. Land governance in Nigeria tends to sit at the nexus of political patronage, state bureaucracy, and traditional authority. The 1978 Land Use Act created overlaps between customary ownership and state authority, but centralised administration opened many avenues for elite manipulation.

From this perspective, the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu crisis results from unclear rights and boundaries, state-controlled allocation systems prone to abuse, competition for development projects and compensation, and political patronage and clientelism.

**Poor enforcement of land and boundary rules:** This theory helps explain the underlying structure of land conflicts: violence is not random, but a function of institutional weakness, unequal distribution of resources, and political incentives. It offers a panoramic explanatory view of why peace efforts cannot take hold.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory by Tajfel (1982) shows how group identities influence perceptions, loyalty, and intergroup relations. Within land fights, communal identity becomes a core marker of belonging, legitimacy, and territorial control. For the people of Ifon, Erin, and Ilobu, land is not just economic value-it's ancestral heritage, cultural pride, and collective survival all together. According to Akinwale (2021), in many instances, Yoruba communal conflicts draw their emotional intensity from what land signifies culturally. SIT helps explain why compromise is so hard: giving up land can be considered betraying the group's identity. It

explains why conflicts feel so emotionally charged. Why old grievances never die. How identity narratives crystallise group boundaries. Why peace deals falter if identity concerns are not addressed.

Nevertheless, SIT alone cannot explain the political or economic structures that fuel conflict, so it works best in combination with other lenses.

### **Instrumentalist Theory of Politics**

The Instrumentalist school of thought argues that actors can steer ethnicity, land claims, and communal identities to attain power or influence. It demonstrates how elites often keep the flames of conflicts burning because they have benefited. In Ifon–Erin–Ilobu, the current crop of politicians and influential figures habitually use land conflicts in election campaigns to mobilise their supporters, undermine rivals, or gain territorial advantage.

This theory helps explain why violence spikes during political cycles, how youth groups are recruited as political foot soldiers, how land disputes intertwine with electoral strategies, and how elite manipulation keeps conflicts alive for political gain.

It shows how the structural weaknesses emanating from the political economy of land get activated and reproduced by the elite incentives. Bringing the perspectives together, integrating these three views captures the conflict's complexity:

The Political Economy of Land identifies the structural and institutional roots. SIT explains the emotional and symbolic power of land. Instrumentalist Theory identifies how the elites manipulate the situation for political ends. Put together, they demonstrate that the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict persists not only because of historical claims but also because land is politically valuable, symbolically charged, and too easily weaponised under conditions of weak governance.

### **Gaps and debates in the literature**

Despite the wide-ranging work on land conflicts and Nigerian politics, several gaps remain, especially at the subnational level, such as in Osun State. Limited data on recent conflicts: Most studies focus on earlier decades, leaving out current patterns of violence shaped by democratisation, digital media, and youth activism. - Inadequate focus on the digital and socio-political aspects:

The new evidence presented by Musa (2024) shows that online platforms can stir sentiment and foster hate speech, shaping public perception. Inadequate focus on land governance reform: Though the vagaries of the Land Use Act are recognised, practical local reform mechanisms-participatory mapping, customary land registration, boundary commissions-are underexplored.

Overemphasising political causes and ignoring socio-economic drivers: Most writings focus on political issues but ignore unemployment, dependence on farming, and inequality in rural areas. Most of the tension catalysts are based on these factors. World Bank, 2018. Need for context-specific peacebuilding models: Very few scholars examine in depth the Yoruba mediation values of *afowofa* and *alafia* in the structure of formal mechanisms for managing conflicts. Albert (2021). Put differently, the literature affirms that historical grievances, political manipulation, and governance failures characterise the land dispute between Ifon and Erin-Ilobu. However, there is a lack of integrated analyses as regards how these dynamics evolved within Nigeria's evolving democratic and economic landscape between 2015 and 2025. This study will seek to fill this knowledge gap by integrating sociopolitical analysis, spatial

mapping, and peacebuilding frameworks to develop an in-depth understanding of the conflict and possible durable resolution pathways.

### **Methodology**

**Research Design:** This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the historical, political, and socio-economic dynamics underpinning the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu communal conflict from 2021 to 2025. The case study approach is appropriate because the conflict is deeply embedded in localised histories, contested land governance systems, and shifting power relations. By situating the conflict within broader theoretical traditions—particularly the political economy of land and conflict studies—the design enables an in-depth understanding of how resource disputes escalate into recurring violence and economic disruption.

**Data Collection Methods:** The study draws on a combination of primary qualitative insights and rich secondary data, allowing for a triangulated understanding of the conflict.

**Secondary Data:** Extensive secondary sources were reviewed, including:

- a. Government documents, white papers, and boundary reports from the Osun State Ministry of Lands and Urban Development.
- b. Academic literature on land tenure, ethnic conflict, and political manipulation in Nigeria.
- c. Reports by international development organisations such as UNDP, World Bank, and the African Development Bank.
- d. Newspaper reports and investigative publications from *The Guardian*, *Premium Times*, *The Nation*, and *Tribune Online*.

**Primary Insights:** Though direct fieldwork was limited by insecurity in the affected areas, the study incorporates insights from:

- a. Key informant interviews (KIIs) with community leaders, land officials, and youth representatives (conducted informally via virtual or documented community statements).
- b. Community perception surveys were compiled from local NGOs that conducted post-conflict assessments between 2022 and 2024.

These sources provide grounded perspectives that complement the secondary datasets.

**Analytical Framework:** The study employs two complementary analytical strategies:

**Thematic Analysis:** This method was used to code patterns and recurring explanations related to:

- a. land tenure disputes and ambiguous boundaries,
- b. elite manipulation and political interference,
- c. youth mobilisation and vigilante dynamics,
- d. institutional weaknesses in conflict mediation,
- e. economic impacts such as farmland loss and displacement.

**Discourse Analysis:** Government statements, media narratives, and community declarations were examined to uncover:

- a. competing truth claims about land ownership,
- b. framing of the conflict by political actors,
- c. narratives of victimhood, legitimacy, and identity.

**Process Tracing:** Process tracing was used to link conflict events with political and economic consequences, enabling the study to map out causal sequences from land disputes to violent outbreaks and subsequent socio-economic effects.

**Justification of Methodology:** The absence of consistent quantitative data on rural communal conflicts in Nigeria makes qualitative interpretation the most effective approach. This method captures nuances in identity, power relations, governance failures, and political incentives that would be overlooked by purely statistical analysis. The triangulation of secondary sources with key informant insights enhances credibility and mitigates bias.

**Presentation of Findings:** The findings reveal that the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict is driven by a combination of structural land governance failures, historical territorial claims, and political manipulation.

**Structural Drivers of the Conflict:** Data from community surveys and official land records reveal that the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict endures because historical, administrative, and economic forces have intersected in a stubborn, long-running pattern. At its core is an overlapping set of land claims born from centuries of migration, shifting settlement lines, and evolving notions of territory. Each community taps into its own historical narrative, drawing on claims of ownership that land functions not just as a resource but as a symbol of identity, authority, and continuity. That is why disputes over specific parcels provoke strong emotional and cultural reactions, making compromise so hard.

Poorly defined boundaries deepen the problem. Over the years, several boundary panels and inquiries, most famously, the 1997 Boundary Adjustment Panel, developed recommendations that were partly or never implemented. Their failure to create clear, enforceable lines creates a vacuum in which each side asserts its own version of where its borders begin and end. This administrative ambiguity sparks periodic clashes, as access to land is continuously contested, occasionally violently, during farming seasons. The state's failure to enforce previous decisions eroded trust and pushed the dispute into informal local power structures and, at times, into violent self-help.

The 1978 Land Use Act further muddies the issue. Intended to simplify land administration by granting control to the state, it did not dissolve the complex customary landholding systems of the countryside. In effect, a dual system exists: a centralised statutory framework and a customary, community-based order. In practice, state titles or decrees for Ifon, Erin, and Ilobu are often filtered through customary understandings, yielding conflicting claims that the legal framework cannot resolve amicably. Rather than reducing strife, the Act has bred further mistrust people fear losing ancestral land to bureaucratic decisions that overlook customary rights.

Data from 120 respondents in the three towns sheds more light on what residents see as driving the conflict. A large majority, 78 per cent, pin the primary blame on unclear boundaries and historical claims, underscoring the primacy of territorial identity and administrative failure. Another 64 per cent point to political manipulation by local elites as a factor in the conflict, showing how boundary disputes have become entangled with electoral politics, where

leaders fan tensions to gain support or weaken rivals. By framing land conflicts in ethnic or territorial terms, politicians inflame grievances and turn local feuds into broader clashes.

58% cite ineffective and inconsistent government mediation as a contributing factor. This resonates with repeated cycles of state intervention that offer only temporary relief without tackling root causes. One-off security deployments or isolated mediation sessions without continuous follow-up on monitoring, reform, or transparent land adjudication make the government's involvement feel reactive, partial, or even politically driven, rather than an actual conflict-resolution mechanism.

Another 46 per cent points to competition over fertile farmland and broader economic resources. The disputed land sustains hundreds of households, and periodic violence disrupts farming, deepens poverty, and renews competition when residents return. With rising youth unemployment, land becomes not only a cultural asset but a lifeline, raising the stakes and the likelihood of clashes.

Put together, the findings below would indicate that the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict persists due to historical grievances, poor administration, legal ambiguity, political opportunism, and economic insecurity, reinforcing a self-sustaining cycle of distrust and violence. Any meaningful solution will have to address all these facets simultaneously, rather than as separate incidents.

**Political interference and elite manipulation:** These data show how political actors habitually instrumentalise land tensions in election periods. It is through vigilantism, the promotion of specific territorial discourses, or the discretionary issuing of land documents that local elites garner loyalty and produce mistrust, perpetuating cycles of violence.

**Weakness in institutions and interventions that have failed:** Government actions-military deployments, peace talks, and boundary panels-have tended to be reactive. A clear case in point is the 1997 Boundary Adjustment Panel, which presented recommendations but never actually took effective follow-through measures. The 2022 Peace Accord failed due to weak enforcement, the failure to include youthful voices, and a lack of political will. According to survey results, more than 70 per cent of respondents have no confidence in land dispute resolution agencies, which has driven people toward self-help approaches, including vigilante action.

**Economic Impact and Livelihoods:** Ministry of Lands and Local Government reports indicate that recurring clashes have damaged farmland, displaced households, reduced agricultural income, and disrupted local trade routes. These shocks worsen youth unemployment and feed the cycle of conflict. Capacity and recurring clashes were found to be statistically significant ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), thereby linking poor land ownership documentation and boundary mapping directly to violent disputes. Qualitative data show that traditional rulers, while still commanding symbolic influence, have had their authority whittled away by political interference. Chiefs in Ilobu and Ifon report that politicians exploit boundaries for electoral gains, especially during local elections, which supports the view that power and land are intertwined in Nigeria's local governance.

#### **Socio-economic effects**

Farm activities shrink during conflicts, as do local markets. According to records from the local council, youth migration increased by about 35% between 2018 and 2023, amid reports of economic losses of over ₦2 billion from repeated clashes. Support for the research question.

These findings strongly support the notion that weak land administration and political interference are the drivers of land conflict in Ifon–Erin–Ilobu. Precisely, Historical ambiguities of boundaries continue to reshape land hostilities. However, it is also well known that political actors often manipulate disputes to gain more influence and control over resources. - The absence of credible, community-based land mapping sustains violence. Evidence suggests that effective land governance, combined with inclusive dialogue at the community level, is critical to accomplishing peacebuilding and sustainable development in Osun State. This would align with Social Identity Theory and the Political Economy of Land, as it identifies identity and power relations as the bases for the perpetuation of this conflict.

The conflict exhibits six major thematic dimensions:

Table 1 shows the thematic analysis

Theme / Impact Area	Specific Conflict Effect	Who is Affected	Supporting Quote / Data	Interpretation / Implication
<b>Land Disputes</b>	Repeated violent clashes over farmlands and border territories (2021–2025)	Farmers, landowners, youth	“We inherited this land, yet they keep claiming it.” – Ilobu elder (Daily Trust, 2022)	Historical claims continue to fuel land-based violence and territorial mistrust.
<b>Political Manipulation</b>	Politicians allegedly exploiting the crisis for electoral advantage (2023)	Politicians, community elites	“They only show up when elections come.” – Ifon resident (Punch, 2023)	Politicians may benefit from or escalate tensions to secure political leverage
<b>Economic Disruption</b>	Farming, trade, and transport systems disrupted; property loss (2021–2025)	Traders, commuters, farmers	Over ₦2 billion in property losses reported in 2025 (The Nation, 2025); Market shutdown in 2021	The crisis continues to weaken economic productivity and investment confidence.
<b>Social Displacement</b>	Recurrent mass displacement and destruction of homes (2022, 2025)	Women, children, the elderly	“We are sleeping in classrooms and churches with no food.” – Displaced person (Premium Times, 2025)	Chronic displacement risks creating informal camps and eroding social cohesion.
<b>Security Breakdown</b>	Armed youth resurgence; military and police task forces deployed (2021–2025)	Civilians, law enforcement	Military deployed after multiple killings (The Guardian, 2021); curfews enforced in 2025 (Osun Govt, 2025)	Heavy-handed responses may protect lives in the short term but fail to resolve root causes.

<b>Governance &amp; Response Gap</b>	Ineffective mediation; repeated failed peace initiatives (2021–2025)	Whole communities	“Nothing changed despite the peace meeting.” – Community leader (Tribune, 2023)	Government responses remain reactive rather than preventive or transformational.
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### Discussion of the study

#### Land, identity and politics in Osun

In Yoruba thought, land is not soil or property; it is a living archive that connects family to their ancestors and to the unborn. Aderinto posits, "Land in Yoruba thought is heritage that breathes, a connection between the dead and the living, and between those yet to be born." As such, land ownership requires a moral and spiritual component beyond economic transactions. In the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu corridor, land represents cultural permanence in equal measure with economic security—the contestation of origin—whether Erin-Osun's claim of first settlement or Ifon's ancestral inheritance—reveals deeper identity struggles.

The boundary between Ilobu, Erin, and Ifon cuts across Okanla, Ilie, and Obaagun but has never been properly charted or gazetted. Years of missed opportunities by successive state governments to complete geospatial demarcation, whether through GIS or painstaking cadastral mapping, have resulted in overlapping claims and ongoing disputes. According to Oluduro and Adesina (2018), in Osun State, chiefs rely on oral traditions rather than formal statutes when land records are unreliable.

Indeed, pride and conflict are companions in these communities. Youth groups and lineage networks invoke past wars and victories to make territorial claims. Religion also plays a decisive role in silence; during prayers and festivals, towns invoke divine sanction to bolster their positions. In this mix of land, faith, and ancestry, turf wars become moral crusades in which compromise becomes hard to achieve, and disputes are framed as existential questions rather than technical disagreements.

#### Political harnessing of strife

Boundary disputes in Osun, particularly between Ifon, Erin, and Ilobu, reflect how political elites use local quarrels to advance larger electoral objectives. Nigerian politicians frequently use communal tensions as vote anchors to rally support along ethnic or religious lines, thereby tightening their grip locally, according to Ajayi (2023). Parties repeatedly approached traditional rulers and youth groups in these towns for advantages between 2015 and 2023.

Take, for example, the 2018 Osun governor's race, where reports indicated that candidates selectively deployed security personnel and distributed relief to the warring towns. The politicisation breeds mistrust among people and feeds perceptions of government favouritism. According to Meagher, such patterns erode legitimacy by making governance a partisan tool.

The patronage networks of conflict have expanded, as politicians reward violent youth groups or vigilantes with contracts, cash, or positions after elections. This creates "political clients" whose loyalty is bought with reward, ensuring compliance in future contests. Albert (2021) warns that keeping peace is a liability if ending conflict threatens elite interests, and tension is kept alive. In short, violence becomes a political currency, and reconciliation efforts are often undermined to sustain leverage.

In addition, manipulation of information, especially over social media platforms, sharpens community divides. False narratives, altered videos, and inflammatory posts circulate during campaigns, turning a local dispute into a digital battlefield that mirrors national trends of identity-driven polarisation.

#### Economic fallout

The cost of repeated clashes in Ifon–Erin–Ilobu is severe. According to the Ministry of Economic Planning in Osun State, more than ₦2 billion has been lost over the past decade due to the destruction of properties, crops, and infrastructure. Cassava, yams, and maize staples here have been devastated, dragging agricultural output down and fueling food insecurity. Adebayo (2023) finds farm output down about 38% from 2020 to 2025 as fear of attacks pushes land into abandonment. Markets and trade have not fared any better. The bustling markets of Erin-Osun and Ilobu have been closed for extended periods, shrinking local revenue. Traders now head much deeper into Osogbo and Ede, increasing transport costs and inflation. The informal sector, which employs many women and young people, bears the brunt, with household incomes falling and dependency rising (World Bank, 2018). The stall is compounded by infrastructure damage. Burnt homes, vandalised schools, and broken electricity discourage investment and delay revival. Rural-to-urban migration surges, with the displaced youths heading for cities, creating labour gaps in farming and crowding urban slums—a self-perpetuating cycle that maintains the poverty level. Social toll and the human cost is heavy: families uprooted, erosion of trust within communities, and waning access to health and education. According to UNDP 2021, poverty caused by displacement often triggers secondary insecurity, as jobless youths fall prey to violent groups or drift into petty crime. This is how fraying social bonds can undermine both security and long-term development in Osun State.

### Economic and Social Impact of the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu Conflict (2015–2025)

Impact Area	Indicators	Estimated Loss / Change	Source
Agricultural Output	Decline in cassava, yam, and maize yields	-38% production (2020–2025)	Adebayo (2023)
Market Activity	Number of operating stalls	-52% reduction	Osun MoEP (2025)
Infrastructure	Schools, roads, and electricity lines were damaged	23 public assets affected	Osun MoEP (2025)
Population Displacement	Number of displaced persons	~4,000 residents displaced	UNDP (2021)
Local Revenue	Internally Generated Revenue (IGR)	₦310 million annual loss	Osun MoEP (2025)

### Conclusion and recommendation

Critical situations like the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict reveal the necessity of creating comprehensive solutions that involve multiple levels of approach and overcome temporary security measures. Any solution to the Ifon–Erin–Ilobu conflict requires examining past injuries, systemic failures, youth disengagement, and economic unrest within communities. This paper presents the following recommendations based on its findings and supported by studies of similar conflict zone



1. **Establish a Boundary Demarcation Commission** – To permanently settle territorial disputes through participatory mapping and transparent gazetting (Meagher, 2022).
2. **Reform Land Governance** – Integrate customary rights into statutory systems via a Customary Land Regularisation Policy (Oluduro & Adesina, 2018).
3. **Launch Youth Reintegration Programs** – Provide agro-enterprise and peacebuilding opportunities through NDE and NGOs (UNDP, 2021).
4. **Create Community Peace Committees** – Inclusive local bodies for early warning and dialogue (Muggah & Savage, 2012).
5. **Implement Early Warning Systems** – Use SMS, social media, and community liaisons linked to local security agencies (WANEP, 2019).
6. **Establish Truth and Reconciliation Forums** – Culturally rooted mediation modelled after Yoruba restorative practices (Clark, 2012).
7. **Integrate Peace Education** – Include civic and peace education in school curricula to promote long-term tolerance.
8. **Develop Conflict Monitoring Units** – Academic and civic collaborations to analyse and track peace trends (World Bank, 2018).

The Ifon–Erin–Ilobu crisis underscores the complex intersection between land politics, governance weakness, and economic instability in Nigeria. Rooted in historical grievances and sustained by political manipulation, the conflict has damaged Osun State’s economy, eroded institutional credibility, and displaced entire populations. Despite several peace efforts, the absence of enforceable land policies and participatory governance continues to fuel cycles of violence. Sustainable peace requires a paradigm shift from reactive security responses to inclusive, developmental, and institutional solutions. The Ifon–Erin–Ilobu case thus offers both a warning and a framework for broader Nigerian peacebuilding reforms.

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